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TOP SECRET
THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

28 OCT 1966

The Honorable Robert S. McNamara
Secretary of Defense
Washington, D. C.

Dear Bob:

I am writing with further reference to my note of 18 October 1966 which forwarded a memorandum concerning intelligence guidance for COMINT programming in certain areas. In my earlier note I referred to the difficulty of establishing the relationship between needs or requirements for information on the one hand, and the costs in money and manpower of meeting these requirements on the other. My purpose in writing this letter is to suggest steps which might help us to a better understanding of ways to make our SIGINT resources more effective.

I believe that a great deal has been accomplished in the last four or five years to improve the effectiveness of SIGINT activities of the Government and to make them responsive to our needs for information in the departments and agencies involved. The review of requirements for COMINT which you initiated jointly with my predecessor, Mr. John McCone, has served a very useful purpose. We have ascertained (for the first time) the sources and totality of requirements which are used to govern the collection and processing of intelligence derived from communications. The validity of many of these requirements has been confirmed. We are continuing the analysis of the other requirements and propose to make the review of our needs for this kind of intelligence a continuing process. We have established a new subcommittee of the SIGINT Committee of USIB for the sole purpose of developing practical guidance for COMINT by specific target entities on a continuing basis.

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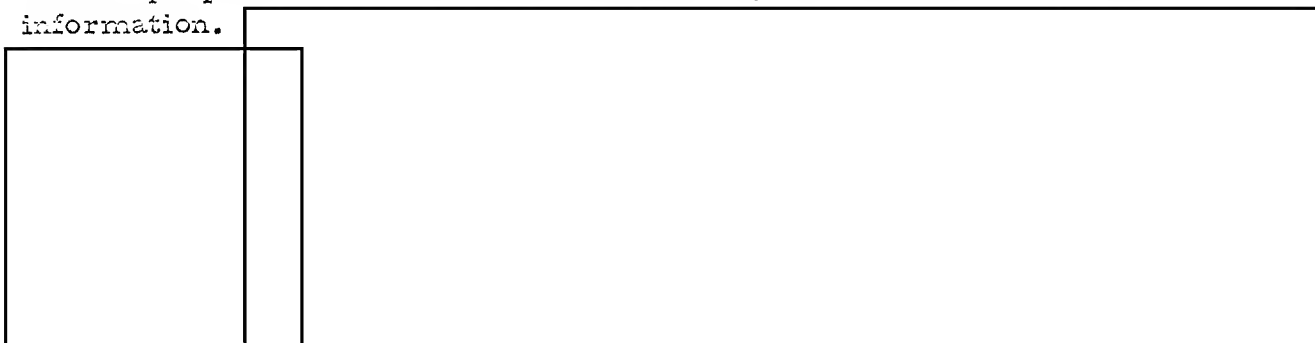
Despite the improvements which have taken place, I do not believe we are yet in a position to say with any assurance that the information attributable to certain of our intelligence programs, or elements of programs, is worth what these programs cost, or whether there are or are not trade offs available to us among information requirements and collection systems designed to respond to them.

Our problem, of course, is partly due to the inherent difficulty of establishing a value for information. Hard information concerning plans and intentions of an enemy is obviously invaluable. Comparatively little information derivable from SIGINT or, for that matter, any intelligence source provides anything like direct insight into the inner councils of foreign or, particularly, Communist governments. In attempting, therefore, to evaluate the contribution to our over-all knowledge made by individual programs, we are inevitably forced into arbitrary judgments concerning the relative significance and relevance of items of information which in themselves may have no overriding importance but which, taken in the aggregate with other data, may have considerable significance.

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A related problem is the difficulty of establishing how much in fact it costs to acquire particular information which can be made available, and the purposes served at lower echelons by the availability of such information.

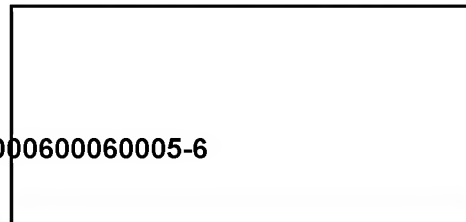
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I note that in his guidance for development on the Consolidated Cryptologic Program for FY 66 - FY 73, [redacted] has directed that every reasonable effort will be made to establish the relationship between resources and collection target objectives. This is a necessary step toward improving our understanding of the responsiveness of intelligence

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programs to actual needs and should prove helpful in testing the practicality of our requirements. The importance of the problem is underscored by the fact that the annual cost of the U. S. SIGINT effort is now projected at 

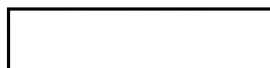
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From what I have said, I think it is apparent that if we are to satisfy ourselves about the effectiveness and efficiency of SIGINT and other expensive and complicated intelligence programs, we must establish more clearly than we have in the past:

- a. The actual value of the information attributable to a particular intelligence program (who uses it and for what purposes), and
- b. The approximate cost of acquiring this information.

Recognizing the difficulty of achieving anything like scientific accuracy, I believe that we can improve our ability to assess both the value and the cost of particular programs. As regards SIGINT activities specifically, I have prepared and attach a list of 20 questions, the answers to which should help us substantially in assessing the value and improving the efficiency of these activities. I believe that if we were able to answer these or a somewhat comparable set of questions we would have achieved a considerable insight into the SIGINT program. Procedural arrangements best calculated to arrive at the answers to questions of the character suggested require some thought. Assuming the validity of the questions, I believe that some of them are susceptible to answer by individual agencies and that others would require review by interagency groups established for this purpose. I would therefore recommend that you designate a representative to review the questions jointly with a member of my staff and formulate recommendations for staff arrangements and assignments appropriate to achieve the necessary answers.

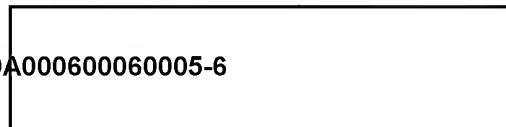
Sincerely,



Richard Helms
Director

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Enclosure

"20" QUESTIONS

We do not have a sufficient understanding of and agreement to the numerous objectives stated for the U. S. cryptologic effort. We have to get correct answers to questions like those posed on the following pages before establishing practical intelligence guidance and determining the type, amount and targeting of resources.

Examination in response to the questions will have to be concerned with technical and political limitations, the availability of information from non-SIGINT sources, costs and the risks of inaction. The questions are not new. Moreover, we recognize that these fundamental questions will take time to analyze and answer, and will involve judgments on complex issues. It is likely that it will be impractical to attempt to answer them all at once and infeasible to answer some completely. Because these questions will require the development of information and data before being answered, they are shorthand for special studies or tasks to be laid on existing staff machinery, such as:

1. Special studies for the SecDef and DCI:
 - a. Single agency assignments
 - b. Inter-agency task force assignments
2. Existing staff or review group studies for the SecDef and DCI:
 - a. Committees of USIB
 - b. OSD staff
 - c. DCI staff.

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